



REDEEMED

Sermon Growth Guide

April 24, 2022

Redeemed - From a Meaningless Life

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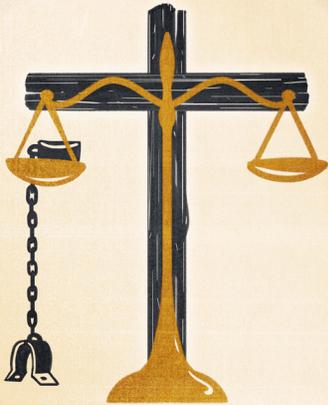
April 24, 2022

Redeemed - From a Meaningless Life

Romans 12:1-2, 9-13

Key Verse: Romans 12:1-2 “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

Big Idea: Jesus has redeemed our lives by His life, death and resurrection. Now He calls us into a purposeful life.



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Foundations

Welcome to the last week of our *Redeemed* series. Christ knew what He was buying when He gave His life on a cross. What has He redeemed us from? This week we see how Jesus redeems us from a meaningless life.

Jesus has redeemed our lives by His life, death, and resurrection. Now He calls us into a purposeful life. Not the empty way of life we were handed (1 Peter 1:18) but the life that is truly life. The life we live as a living sacrifice to our Lord, submitted for His service and empowered by His Spirit to love God and love one another in the great mission of Jesus to continue to redeem all the world, to overcome evil with good, until all is set right again.

Many of our friends have graduated from service in this life to glory in the next. They know the truth. In Jesus Christ we are redeemed.

Understanding God’s Word

Understanding God’s Word is an invitation for the renewing of our minds. How does understanding this passage help you discern how to live? What role does God’s mercy play in that?

Applying God’s Word

There is a sense of wonder that our physical, bodily, ordinary, average every-day lives intersect with the cosmic story of our Creator. Of the list of instructions Paul gives in Romans 12:9-13, what do a few of these look like in your life? What are some first steps you can take toward this?

Witnessing God’s Word

Because the tomb is empty your life doesn’t have to be. Where have you witnessed the way of life Christ has purchased for you? Where have you seen how the resurrection provides meaning and where do you still struggle with a meaningless life?

Alfred Nobel was a Swedish chemist who made a fortune inventing powerful explosives and licensing the formula to governments to make weapons. In 1888, Nobel's brother died, and a French newspaper accidentally printed Alfred's obituary instead, with the headline, "The Merchant of Death is Dead." It identified him as the inventor of dynamite, and a man who became wealthy facilitating new levels of mass destruction. Nobel was horrified to learn how he would be remembered, discovering in that moment that the values and markers of a meaningful life, extolled by the world around us, can be found wanting.

The last thing any of us want to experience, upon assessing our years, is a disconnect between how we've lived and how we wish we'd lived. Yet that's always a possibility if we draw our meaning from the wrong sources. John Ortberg notes, "Our advertisements are filled with promises to give you the very things you wouldn't want listed in your obituary: great looks, great money, great food, great widescreen TVs."

In contrast to Nobel's story, consider the Apostle Paul's perception when he looked back at the end of his life. It's impossible to miss the note of triumph in his declaration: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." (2 Timothy 4:7)

Our Easter celebration of Christ's resurrection power still extends to today's worship. For the past 50 years on this Sunday after Easter, we've celebrated those who have finished their race here on earth, and have gone home to be with the Lord. As we miss their presence and influence, we're comforted by the Bible's promise that they're experiencing life even more fully on the other side of death, and that we'll be together

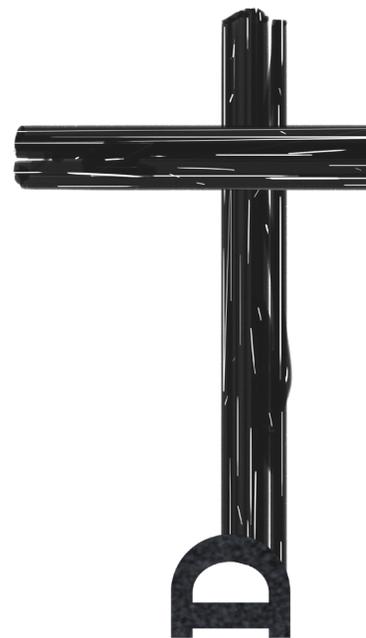
again. Remembering these dear ones also reminds us of our own finish line, that our time on earth will also one day come to an end.

There's not a person here today who wouldn't like to feel as good about our lives as Paul did about his. But how do we cultivate and maintain a meaningful life? How do we remain purposeful when there's so much that can subtly tug us off course? How do we get it right enough days that we can feel good about how we've lived?

Today's passage offers some helpful guidance. It begins, "Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy..." (Romans 12:1). This opening word, "Therefore," informs us that there's a larger context to today's text. In the first 11 chapters of this book, Paul focused primarily upon God's great mercy in what He's done for us. Another way to put it would be, "Therefore, because Jesus has redeemed you, this is how you're to live in response." The remaining five chapters of Romans describe what a grateful response to God's great mercy looks like.

Paul continues, "...offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship." (Romans 12:1) We're used to talking about giving God our heart; giving Him our body feels a bit less familiar. Think of it this way: our bodies represent the total person. As God's redeemed people, we're offering Him all of who we are.

This reference to a living sacrifice invites images of Old Testament sacrifices. Whatever was brought to the altar no longer belonged to the one offering it, but to God. Paul is saying, we're to dedicate to God as holy all that we do with our lives. Or, as the Message translates this verse: "Take your everyday, ordinary life—



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your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering.” (The Message) When we do this, it’s as pleasing an act of worship to God as our time here together on Sunday.

There’s a hitch, though. The evangelist, DL Moody, noted, “The problem with a living sacrifice is that it keeps crawling off the altar.” If we’re honest, our activity each day often has our good in mind as much if not more than God’s. So, two actions are offered to help us remain devoted to the one who’s redeemed us.

The first is, “Do not conform to the pattern of this world...” (Romans 12:2). We tend to be imitative by nature; from childhood on, we feel the pressure to go along and blend in. As we go through life, we’re constantly hearing messages of what’s important, that we need to give ourselves to. In the same way that a sponge absorbs spills, we tend to absorb much of what we’re exposed to without even realizing it. The Greek word for “conform” was commonly used to describe molding clay around a form. Paul is saying, “Don’t let the world squeeze you into its mold.” Rather than buying what society around us is selling, we need to take a closer look and realize that much of it won’t result in lasting meaning. We were made for more.

So, Paul also offers an alternative: “but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2). The same word for transformed was used by Matthew and Mark in their Gospels to describe how Jesus was changed during His moment of transfiguration. The only other time it occurs in the New Testament is in 2 Corinthians 3:18, which describes how believers are changed into the likeness of Christ.

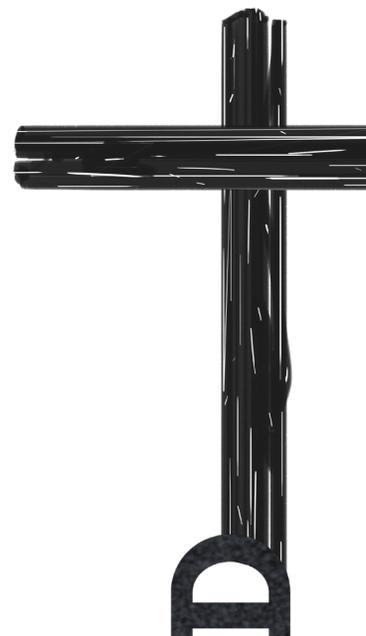
During my early years, life was primarily about me. When I married, I

wisely made life also about Deborah ... but it was still primarily about me. Then our children were born, and God transformed me through them over the years, carving out a deeper love for others. Paul says something similar: that as we submit to God’s instruction in the Bible and under the influence of His Holy Spirit, God will change us within. As Chuck Swindoll put it: “Our minds begin to think as God thinks, to desire what God desires, to love as God loves, and to see things with the same perspective as He sees them.”

Paul assures us that this transformation will lead to a way of life that’s good and pleasing: “Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing, and perfect will” (Romans 12:2). Let’s take a moment to do just that: test the goodness of God’s best for us by holding it up against the world’s best for us.

The message we hear in so many ways from the world around us is: Lean back and enjoy. We’re told, “You deserve more,” “Take what you can get,” “If it feels good, do it,” and “Don’t miss out!” Tish Warren writes, “We are disciplined by nearly every impulse of our culture to believe that the here-and-now is all there is; that the only hope offered for us is found in what we can taste, smell, feel, and see.” When we believe this is all there is, our instinct is to want to grab everything we can today. The problem, as author Gordon MacDonald once put it, is that much of what we pursue is like cotton candy to our digestive system. It provides a momentary lift, but it won’t last, and it certainly lacks a lasting meaning.

In contrast, Jesus’ message is: Lean forward and live. He calls us away from self-indulgence and comfort, into a life of deeper meaning and purpose. Jesus promises, “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” (John



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10:10) Life becomes meaningful not through accumulation, but through giving ourselves away. In the latter portion of today's text, Paul offers a number of ways to do this.

Verses 9-15 are packed with instructions that we don't have time to explore in depth, so I want to make an observation, then ask something of you. A large portion of these verses describe a transformed life, given away to others as we live out the love and redemption we've experienced from our Lord:

"Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves." (Romans 12:10)

"Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality." (Romans 12:13)

"Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse." (Romans 12:14)

"Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn." (Romans 12:15)

A meaningful life that will stand the test of time is usually one that makes a difference in the lives of others.

With that said, I want to offer you these verses, 9-15, as homework this week. Homework?! When's the last

time I got homework from a sermon? Here's what I'd like you to do. Would you spend time slowly reading this list of instructions each day this next week? Ponder how you might live them out during the following 24 hours. Ask God's leading and help to do so. Allow yourself to be transformed by the renewing of your mind, as the Holy Spirit guides you with this instruction.

Do you remember the story of Alfred Nobel? Horrified by how his life would be remembered, Nobel determined to make a change. He used the wealth he'd accumulated to establish the Nobel Prizes, awarded annually since 1901 for achievement in the arts and sciences. Nobel pivoted from a life that flowed inward, to a life flowing outward. In doing so, his lasting legacy became much more meaningful.

Yes, a life of giving ourselves away goes against many of the values that inundate us. But when we understand that Christ redeemed and purchased our lives, we want to gratefully respond by offering back to Him all of who we are. To not fit into the world around us, but to be transformed by God's great power, into followers who live meaningfully.

